



Sustainable tourism in Brezovica Sharr Mountains

The sustainable tourism concept follows the concept and principles of the EU Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

The geographical position, mild continental climate, mountains, gorges, flora and fauna, and natural and cultural heritage are key elements of the tourism product, Brezovica and Sharr Mountains

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Research Paper

Sustainable tourism in Brezovica – Sharr Mountains

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Abstract

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

“In the universe are billions of galaxies, in our galaxy are billions of planets, but there is Only One Earth. Let’s take care of it”. (* UNWTO – Earth Day 2022)

“Climate change, nature, and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste – evidence that Earth is “suffering” is all around us and growing more ominous every day. At the same time, billions of people are short of income, food, shelter, health care, and education. Energy and food crises on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and a spike in conflicts around the world are further causes for concern” (Earth Day 2022).

The way out of this dilemma is the overwhelming transformation of economies and societies to make them inclusive, fair, and more connected with nature. The whole world and we Kosovars must shift from harming the planet to healing it. We must protect what we have and bring back what we lost to advance to a better, ***more sustainable future***, where everyone can thrive.

World Tourism Organization UNWTO revised definition of sustainable development of tourism conceptual definition is as follows:

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices apply to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Thus, ***sustainable tourism should:***

1. ***Make optimal use of environmental resources*** that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes, and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. ***Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities***, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
3. ***Ensure viable, long-term economic operations***, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

The participation of all relevant stakeholders

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders and strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, and introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience for the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

Sustainability should be sought in all landscapes, whether urban or rural, in a traditional resort or eco-camp; ***community acceptance, engagement, and benefit are critical***; and the “uniqueness of place” is protected to the fullest extent feasible.

The quality of the environment, both natural and man-made, is essential to tourism. However, the relationship of tourism with the environment is complex. It involves many activities that can have adverse environmental effects. Many of these impacts are linked with the construction of general infrastructures such as roads and airports, as well as tourism facilities, including resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops, recreation areas, and facilities. The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually destroy the environmental resources on which it depends. The illegal, unplanned, and uncontrolled construction of business structures, villas, and chalets, in the name of “tourist villages” (“hotels and motels”), by residents and un-residents, are destroying environmental resources, degrading the biodiversity and landscaping, and disturbing the local traditions and way of life.

On the other hand, tourism has the potential to create beneficial effects on the environment by contributing to environmental protection and conservation. It is a way to raise awareness of environmental values and it can serve as a tool to finance the protection of natural areas and increase their economic importance.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Accelerating progress toward sustainability is critical. In many cases, the solutions are already available, affordable, and scalable. We can still avoid the worst of the climate crisis. We can halt further biodiversity loss. We can protect and revive degraded ecosystems. We can clean up our air, water, and soil. We can repair our relationship with nature, and we can still achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed upon in 2015 by all countries in the United Nations. The SDG Goals were set, and the whole society, both at the local and national level, needs to act now, as well as throughout the mid and long-term periods.

EU Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

The sustainable tourism concept follows the concept and principles of the EU Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The Western Balkan region, on its path to joining the European Union, was fairly quick to subscribe to the European principles and standards, but continuously fails to implement them. Many challenges are ahead, but at the same time, the new policy– the Green Agenda for the Western

Balkans – offers much more opportunities to overcome these challenges. Following its previous logic of Cohesion Policy and Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) policy, the European Commission has put forward the ***EU Green Deal focused on the EU Member States***, and ***additionally proposed a Green Agenda policy*** for the Western Balkans countries.

New trends in the tourism market

There is a growing demand for travel that engages the senses, stimulates the mind, incorporates unique activities, and relates personally to travellers, on an emotional, physical, spiritual, or intellectual level.

Tourism development represents a complex interaction, among many actors with shared responsibilities, regarding the environmental, economic, and social sustainability of the Tourism Industry. This includes, for example:

- ***The tourism industry*** promotes sustainable products,
- ***The consumer*** develops sustainable consumption modalities, as well as
- ***Public authorities*** create a suitable climate and framework for the use of resources and a favorable commercial-level scope, among many actors.

The strategic resource of Kosovar tourism is a space with multiple values, relatively preserved so far, that in the long run, will be more and more important, not only in economic terms but also in the ecological, economic, social, and cultural life.

The geographical position, mild continental climate, mountains, gorges, flora and fauna, and natural and cultural heritage, are key elements of the product, which make Brezovica and Sharr Mountains a popular tourist destination for tourists from the country, the Balkan region, as well as international - foreign visitors, including the Kosovo Diaspora from different countries.

1. Introduction

Methodology

Assessment of the real situation on the ground was realized through the visit of relevant stakeholders, starting with ministries, agencies, and municipality directorates, discussing the matter with responsible authorities, as well as other stakeholders relevant to the topic. Accordingly, and based on a plan, the visits were conducted over a period of three weeks by the contracted Tourism Expert, with expertise in Tourism Planning and Development, Tourism Product Development, and Project Cycle Management. In conducting the Assessment, the Expert began by conducting a literature and documents review to identify sources of documentation relevant to Brezovica and Sharr Mountains Tourism Development, specifically the Sustainable Tourism experiences and opportunities, both at Brezovica and Sharr Mountains, with the focus on resource protection and biodiversity conservation, as well as environmental protection in the respective region. The Expert organized several visits with relevant stakeholders to meet with representatives of Ministries. He also visited the Štrpce/Shtërpce and Prizren Municipalities and their staff working in the Economic and Tourism sector, tourism and heritage NGOs, a Professional Education School, as well as various regional biodiversity and environmental specialists. He organized several meetings with respected sector experts and specialists from Brezovica, Prizren, and Dragash (Opoja, Gora, and Brod). He paid visits to tourism and hospitality business representatives, as well as the long-term managers of former socially-owned enterprise/NSH Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica. As part of the three visits to Brezovica, the Expert held a half-day visit to the **NSH Inex Sharr Planina Brezovicë** facilities and the Muržice/Murzhica Valley, where the ***degradation*** and environmental destruction have been taking place for a long period, starting in the 90s and continuing during the next period of the recent twenty-two years. The visits to the Štrpce Municipality, Prizren, and Sharri National Park were organized with the aim to discuss the municipality's

plans for tourism development, according to their municipality planning and development orientation, which should be in full conformity to Sharr National Park (***established by the Kosovo Assembly by a special law 11/86 in 1986***), with the Law No. 04/L-087 on National Park Sharri (ref.: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2866>).

The field assessment was focused on the necessity for tourism zoning and regulative planning. The Expert, during his fieldwork, collected and consulted draft development projects, at the Sharr Mountain, municipality level in Štrpce/Shtërpce, related to Sustainable Tourism Development, including resources and Biodiversity Protection. The Expert organized several visits in Pristina to the Ministry of Spatial Planning, the Spatial Planning Department and Housing Department, the Agency for Environment Protection, and the Privatization Agency of Kosovo (PAK), and held meetings with a diverse range of representatives from the government agencies, donors, and civil society, to gather relevant information and documents.

The Research Paper is focused on the timing, circumstances, and events, related to the economic and tourism development in the post-war period, i. e. between 2000 - 2022, except for the period of COVID 19 pandemic in 2019 – 2021, as well as on the actual situation and the future. The pandemic and global economic and security crises will be remembered for their negative impacts on all economic sectors, with an exceptional impact on the whole tourism industry, including hospitality, gastronomy, tourism transport, and the community tourism sector.

1.1. A brief overview of Kosovo tourism development, specifically sustainable tourism development

1.1.1. A brief overview of sustainable tourism development in Brezovica Sharr Mountain

Kosovo in a wider perspective, as well as Brezovica, Sharr Mountains region as a tourist destination, needs to be adequately researched. Hundreds of kilometers of mountain ranges, endless mountain trails, rushing streams, rivers, glacial lakes, three dozen of picturesque villages, customs, and traditions, attractive traditional arts, and handicrafts, with the traditional gastronomy, based on antiquity and unique storytelling and legends, represent the wealth of tourism potential and resources. Brezovica and Sharr Mountains Region, with their exceptional cultural heritage, is well-known for its multinational, multilingual, and diverse religion. The Sharr region is well-known for its unique hospitality, and warmly welcoming individual visitors, small groups, and organized groups of tourists. Here, nature, culture, and tradition, are unparalleled and unique, yet relatively unspoiled.

Sharr National Park lies in the south of Kosovo, in a part of the Ferizaj/Uroševac and Prizren Regions. The Park covers an area of 53,272 hectares and is located in the northern part of the Sharri Mountains, a mountain range that stretches across north-eastern Albania, south-eastern Kosovo, and north-western North Macedonia. The Park includes various terrains among which glacial lakes, as well as alpine, and glacial landscapes stand out. Sharr National Park extends to the Sharr, Oshlak/Ošlak, Koxha Balkan, and Pashallare mountains. The Park's southern border lies along the state border between Kosovo and North Macedonia, as well as Albania in the south. The border passes over the highest peaks of Sharri, most of which exceed the altitude of above 2500 m. Çuka e Ligenit (2604 m.), Bistra (2651 m.), etc.*). *More about Sharr National Park in the next chapters.*

Tourism development and hospitality in Kosovo, including Brezovica and Sharr Mountain area, based on time and historical circumstances, can be considered in three periods of cyclical and highly controversial movements:

- a. ***The significant development period during the 1970s was*** within the former Yugoslavia. During this period, significant capacities of tourist structures were built, and professional-managerial and operational staff were educated on a relatively good level both in Kosovo and in the most popular centers in the republics within the Federation, and Kosovo was supported to reach a breakthrough

toward the domestic and international tourism market. In particular, the Brezovica area '**NSH Inex Sharr Planina**' was supported with new hotels 'Narcis' and 'Molika', with a capacity of 275 rooms and 620 beds. In the same period, the existing skiing infrastructure was upgraded and new infrastructure was developed, e. g. ski and chair lifts were constructed and installed. Along with the new capacities and structures, the development had a strong impact on workforce development, bringing the best practices from well-known ski centers in Serbia and Slovenia. The specific positive impact was palpable on the employment of the local communities, Prizren, and the wider region. The tourism development structures and capacities were based on professional planning, architectural design, and strong oversight and control of the natural resources and their impact on the environment. During this period, the 'Ski Center Brezovica' was promoted and visited by visitors from all republics of the Former Yugoslavia and regional countries, such as Turkey and Greece. In this period, the largest tourism enterprises and segments were socially owned enterprises. All hotels as well as tourism and gastronomic enterprises in Brezovica and the wider Sharr Mountain region had the same status.

- b. ***The degrading and destructive period from 1989-1999***, after the abrogation of the Autonomy of Kosovo, the breakup of the Federal state of Yugoslavia and its economic system, with devastating consequences for Kosovo and all its economic sectors; the industrial, airway, and road infrastructure. The same faith was shared by Brezovica and the whole Sharr Mountain region, with the degradation and destruction both of the environmental values and touristic structures, with the drastic decline in the travel of domestic, regional, and international tourists to Kosovo, Brezovica, and the Sharr Mountain region.
- c. ***The period from mid-1999 onwards***, when Kosovo initially faced a period of infrastructure reconstruction, the reopening of Pristina International Airport, and changes in the economic system, which took place thanks to private initiatives and investments, at first in urban centers, and later also in rural areas. Unfortunately, some negative developments, later on, occurred in Brezovica and several mountain urban centers of the Sharr Mountain Region. In these areas, the reconciliation process had been quite slow immediately after the war until the decentralization process, and the establishment of the Municipality. The establishment of the Štrpce/Shtërpce Municipality in 2014, with the Serbian majority at the Municipality level, did not give the expected results in economic development aspects. Even then, when positive changes were expected, the economic development and the privatization process stalled. The privatization of socially owned enterprises did not take place at all, resulting in a lack of ownership transformation, and a lack of the development of private initiatives and businesses, generally and specifically in the tourism sector. These circumstances had quite negative consequences for the growth of privately-owned enterprises in all economic sectors. ***In the absence of any strategic plans for proper development*** at the Kosovo level, the tourism sector, during the post-war period, marked the beginning of ***relatively poor planning orientation and development***, with the ***largest concentration of accommodation capacities out of the tourist attractions and urban centers in Kosovo***. The same faith was shared by Brezovica and Sharr Mountain region. Furthermore, the unplanned and uncontrolled, mostly illegal chaotic construction took place in the Brezovica area, specifically in the most attractive Muržica Valley, starting from the Magistral Road up to the beginning of the ski infrastructure and Hotel Molika. On this issue, criminal investigations are being conducted against the Mayor of Štrpce and other officials of the municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce, as well as against various businesses, and individuals, based on suspicions of having committed crimes related to corruption, misuse of office, etc.*).

*) Kallxo. Com: <https://kallxo.com/tag/rasti-brezovica/>; <https://kallxo.com/lajm/rasti-brezovica-prokuroria-me-aksion-per-identifikimin-e-objekteve-ilegale/> ; <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/rasti-brezovica-26-te-arrestuar-19-nga-ta-ne-paraburgim-dhe-afer-6-milione-euro-te-bllokuara/>.

Based on the wide range of municipal authority, as well as the fair possibilities of communication and collaboration with the central ministerial levels of Kosovo, the situation could improve basically and

substantially. Political will and stronger responsibility are needed on both institutional levels, for the sake of the development of sustainable tourism and overall communities, through joint planning and development activities and programs for Brezovica and the wider Sharr region, with the aim of achieving long-expected results for all economic sectors and community business activities, in the interest of the Tourism sector development, including all sustainable forms of the community employment and welfare.

The experiences of EU and other development assistance agencies on sustainable tourism development

The experiences of the most helpful development assistance agencies indicate that sustainable tourism does not simply happen. ***It requires an overall strategy and detailed planning***, with a host of supporting mechanisms including public-private partnerships, enabling legislative and institutional reforms, training and public education, infrastructure and technology, and often finance and credit systems that reach down to the poorer members of the community, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Tourism is a potent form of development and can be intrusive, with the potential to affect almost every aspect of life in the host destination, for better or worse. A belief that tourism “can take care of itself” is risky and may well be unfounded. ***Development assistance agencies’ interventions*** include helping develop tourism in its initial phases and mitigating the environmental impacts of more advanced stages of poorly planned and executed tourist development, especially in Mountain areas of Kosovo, like the Brezovica and Sharr Mountains zones.

1.1.2. Actual situation of Brezovica Ski Center - SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina

Brezovica ski resort was established in 1954. The ski resort area is ideally situated on the north and northwest-facing slopes of the Sharr National Park. The first of five ski lifts in the resort was installed in 1979. The resort features 16 kilometers of ski slopes located on the north and northeast-facing slopes of the Sharr Mountains. The resort was the host of several international skiing events in the 1980s and 1990s. Although Brezovica served as an alternative site for downhill skiing events of the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games and hosted several International Ski Federation events in the 1980s and 1990s; the resort has not received significant infrastructure investments for more than three decades.

In the 4-5 years period after the war, former Social Own Enterprise (SOE) Management made some basic efforts to restart and keep both Hotel ‘Narcis’ and Hotel Molika as well as some smaller gastronomic units operational. According to the basic construction and operational development concept, Ski Center Brezovica, specifically, Hotel Molika, was oriented mostly toward winter tourism and weekend visitors, and secondary to outdoor and event activities, with a high level of seasonality. While ‘Hotel Narcis’, besides winter tourism, based on its location, operates other forms of tourism, such as Convention and Event activities, as well as gastronomic business, specifically during the weekends and holidays. Due to the lack of basic maintenance investments, the oldest “Hotel Breza” was completely neglected. In the same period, despite the attempts of the management, the lack of investments during the 1990s and after the war period, as well as the low interest of visitors, the Narcis Hotel, once one of the best Mountain Hotels in Former Yugoslavia, is ***actually almost completely out of operation***. During the research period, the only structures in operation remain the Hotel “Molika”, in fact, only two floors of the accommodation department and restaurant, mainly during the holidays and winter - ski season. One of the decisive reasons for the inappropriate and unfavorable situation of the SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina is the absence of the privatization process of the assets of the SOE/NSH ‘Inex Sharr Planina’ - Ski Center Brezovica”, The lack of interest of the business community and institutions, for investments based on public-private partnership, due to the legal status of the SOE, low business standards (outdated equipment and furniture, lack of appropriate staff, lack of basic maintenance investments, etc.), and high seasonality, had a major impact on the actual unfavorable situation of the Enterprise. The inaction of the local community and local authorities, as well as the hesitation of central authorities to propose and discuss jointly appropriate legal forms of the Privatization process, or negotiate any other forms of official institutional support, towards some kind of normality of their business activities, left **SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina, as well as the Community-based tourism**, out of the planning and development processes.

In the same period, several new private hotels were constructed, with owners from Pristina and other urban centers of Kosovo, specifically Hotel ‘Brezovica’, with larger and higher standard premises and operational capacities. In addition, some smaller operational capacities and lower standard hotels were constructed and were operational at higher locations along Muržica Valley and near Hotel Molika. According to written and digital media information, the owners are on an investigation with the ongoing legal process “Case Brezovica”. The legal process is based on investigations concerning the laws in place, in particular, the laws on spatial planning, environment protection, and national parks.

Recently, more interested visitors, both domestic, cross-border, and international tourists, are demanding more sustainable forms of tourism, oriented toward outdoor activities in four seasons of the year, with alternate forms of accommodation and F&B services, and more diversified experiences including local traditions, arts and family and local festivities. (* Research Paper “Soft tourism in Kosovo with special focus on Dečan/Decani area”; EUSR – KSDW 2021).

1.1.3. Critical phase for action - the immediate and mid-term measures for the protection of natural resources

The unplanned, unjustified, and chaotic investment activities of private businesses, resident and non-resident investors of business structures, mountain chalets, and villas, are dispersed throughout Sharr Mountains. The worst situation prevailed in Brezovica – Muržica Valley, and at Prevalla Passage, worse than anywhere in the region. Namely, there might be cases of illegal construction in Brezovica during the 1980s and 1990s, but not on such a scale of uncontrolled and illegal construction as in the last two decades. The same destructive constructions happened in Prevalla Passage, not far from Brezovica, where the primary natural and health resources are misused and destroyed illegally, by “brave and fury boys”, some powerful political actors, and business tycoons. The seriousness of the degradation lately was the subject of the authorities taking action – additional Criminal Investigation on the case ‘Brezovica**). Recently, the Prosecutor of the Case; has ordered the Construction Inspectors, to undertake all measures to identify the legal bases of the construction permits and other documents for all construction activities, subject to the Law Process. ***But more short-term and mid-term activities and actions are needed at all levels and with all local and central authorities and stakeholders.***

Other environmental destruction and degradation activities, besides the widely-spread illegal construction, are the Construction of small Hydro Power units, almost in all mountain streams, such as Muržica Stream in three places, at very strictly protected zones and locations, near the Ski slopes and infrastructure, not far from Hotel ‘Molika’. The same or worse situation besides strong protests from the local communities is happening along the Lepenci River, in the village Bitia e Epërme/Gornje Bitinje***), not far from the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce. Several protests were organized by the local community and civil society against the construction and operation of the HPP in the Brezovica region. The negative impacts on biodiversity, the very rich flora and fauna that existed in the localities and zones are graves.

1.1.4. Developments and travel experiences in Brezovica and Sharr region

Hotels in Brezovica, namely Hotel ‘Narcis’, Hotel ‘Molika’, Hotel “Breza” and ‘Stojkova Kuća’, emerged from the flourishing 1970s as organizational units of the **SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina** (‘socially owned enterprises and properties), **suffered degradation and destruction during the 1990s, due to the lack of business, investments, and even basic maintenance.** Among them is the emblematic Hotel ‘Narcis’, once in Ex-Yugoslavia considered among the best 5* Mountain hotels. Despite this, the Brezovica ski center is highly frequented, especially during the winter season because of its valued ski slopes. The tourists accommodate themselves in the existing resources, Molika hotel, Ski school, private houses, and smaller hotels. During the spring and summer, it is a destination for many visitors, especially the area part where the weekend zone is located. This tourist center has great potential for further developing Mountain tourism, welcoming visitors and guests around the year, especially winter tourism.

) and *) Kallxo. Com: <https://kallxo.com/tag/rasti-brezovica/>.

Relatively good results in the tourism and hospitality industry represent private businesses in other areas of Sharr Mountain, such as the Mountain Resort ‘Sharri’, near Prevala, and Mountain Resort ‘Arxhena’ at Brod Mountain and Valley, Dragash Municipality. These two Mountain Resorts are success stories, thanks to their private business initiatives, ***passing through multiple challenges***, without understanding and support from central institutions. Their business development was supported with professional expertise, throughout all planning and development phases, starting with the Concept Development, Feasibility Study, and Business plans, followed by operating and promoting their Hospitality structures. While Resort Hotel Arxhena even invested in a rather modest ski infrastructure, but an operational one, achieving good results animating and welcoming visitors from Kosovo and Albania, throughout the year.

In the ***education sector***, there are more initiatives and projects, supported by international agencies, to improve the situation on professional education, VET, dual education, training, teaching standards, curricula, programs, and manuals, focused initially on the pre-university level, and less on the higher education. The professional education process in Brezovica is operated at the pre-university level (based on the education system of Serbia). In Prizren, tourism and hospitality education and training are ongoing in two public high schools and at the recently started university level. In the Municipality of Prizren, 2 Training sessions (21 days each) were organized some years ago for the whole Sharr Region, one for the Tour Guides and the other for Travel Agencies – ‘Product and Destination Planning, Development Management, organized by Prizren Municipality, implemented by ‘TPD Consulting’ from Pristina.

At the central institutional level, Tourism and Hospitality have been added since the beginning to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), at the level of a Department for Tourism, with low-scale interest, budget, and professional human resources. At the beginning of 2007, the German Government Agency GTZ offered its support in several directions and projects, focusing initially on the preparation of the Draft Strategy of Tourism, as well as the ***Project ‘Tourism Development of Sharr Mountain Tourist Region’***. In 2008, after several months of work with all stakeholders on the Project of Sharr Mountain, the Project was stopped in the middle of the process due to neglect by the MTI (MINT). Unfortunately, both the abovementioned project, as well as the Draft Strategy of Tourism in Kosovo, were never passed by the Government and the Assembly of Kosovo.

Several donors and international government agencies were engaged in similar supportive activities and projects, with a great impact on tourism businesses, and some initial successes with government bodies. When the whole world, both developed and developing countries are prioritizing the tourism sector at the top level, ***it is about the time for Kosovo Government, International supporting agencies, and all related stakeholders, to take a similar approach and give the chance to faster, well planned and coordinated Tourism Development of Kosovo, focused, for good reason, on Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development.***

Besides the Ministry of Industry Entrepreneurship and Trade MINT, responsible for the tourist sector, there are at least 3 other ministries, linked to tourism development, namely the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning, and Infrastructure, and Ministry of Agriculture. ***The inter-ministerial coordination on tourism planning, development, and promotion, is inadequate with poor results and impact***, so much is needed in joint development programs in tourism, specifically in sustainable tourism, including community-based tourism (ECO, AGRO, and Rural Tourism).

The international community, diplomatic offices, and other supporting agencies insisted many times, calling on joint action of all relevant ministries, towards an improved organization and activities on sustainable tourism development, targeting Environment protection, positive impacts on climate change and community development, expressing their will and readiness to support such necessary actions. This Research Paper supported by EUSR in Kosovo, is a valuable continuation of their action in the right direction, having in mind primarily the great tourism potentials and values of Brezovica and Sharr Mountains in Kosovo, as well as the need for joint coordination on the protection and preservation of natural

and cultural heritage values, which in mountainous regions are quite misused, degraded and neglected, as determined during the research period.

1.1.3.1. The Importance of tourism development in Brezovica - Sharr Mountain

Tourism Development in Brezovica - Sharr Mountains must be one of the top Government and Municipality priorities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization and economic use of rich natural resources of Brezovica and Sharr Mountain; • <i>Use of natural and cultural resources in a recoverable way (enjoying landscapes, natural beauties, mountain running rivers and lakes, flora, and fauna, outdoor activities, etc.);</i> • Promotion of foreign and domestic direct investments in sustainable Tourism development; • <i>Regional Tourism Development, focused on integrated rural development aiming the growth</i>, in general, and especially the involvement of women and youth; • <i>Stimulating private, individual, and family economic initiatives</i>, through sustainable forms of tourism – Community-based Tourism and family initiative, as an effective tool for poverty alleviation, and accelerated family economy development; • <i>More balanced regional development at the national level</i>, as well as at Sharri regional level. 	

Besides all the challenges and the lack of institutional understanding and support, the institutions and all relevant stakeholders should state and promote widely the economic impacts of the Tourism industry in Kosovo, jointly with the social and environmental impacts. Every year in Kosovo, the *following beneficiaries profit from tourism and hospitality*:

Beneficiaries from Tourism and Hospitality in Kosovo, Brezovica Sharr Mountains	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large number of employees, as well as their families, • All other economic sectors: 	
• Trade in consumer goods,	• Environment and biodiversity protection
• Trade in food items and beverages,	• Construction sector,
• Agriculture, livestock, beekeeping, fisheries,	• Traditional Arts & Handicrafts
• Food and beverage industry,	• Crafts,
• Trade-in fuels,	• Local community and their families,
• Transport	• Cultural community,
• Kosovo budget and municipal tax funds, etc.	• The religious community, etc.

Unfortunately, both at the central, regional, and local levels in Kosovo, it appears there is little understanding of tourism, not just about leisure and fun, but as a complex sector comprising a whole set of scientific and experience issues that need to be adequately understood, recognized, learned, and applied.

1.1.3.2. Some basic statistical data on Kosovo Tourism in Brezovica Sharr Mountains

Besides some recent improvements, revealed by touristic statistics, there are still gaps and doubts on the real and trusted data, related to the accommodation capacities, arrivals, and “who” are real international tourists, which are not adequately based on UNWTO Definition and Statistics, as only a selected number of accommodation capacities are followed regularly. There is a gap, specifically in the number of international tourists, based on border entry points and hotel arrivals. Inadequate statistics are excluding Kosovo Diaspora from the group of international tourists, considering them wrongly as usual Kosovar citizens, no matter that their permanent domicile is in various European and overseas countries.

Tourist accommodation capacities in Kosovo and Sharr region *)

Based on data from the Statistics Agency, Kosovo has over 11,811 beds for guest accommodation, with 7077 rooms which are spread over 499 accommodation units. The largest number of accommodation units belongs to hotels, with 2239 units, and motels with 179 units.

Accommodation units and capacities in Kosovo, and Sharr Mountains, including Brezovica

Accommodation types	Units	Rooms	Beds
	Kosovo*)	Kosovo	Kosovo
Hotels	239	4.873	7.790
Motels	179	2.160	2.874
Guesthouses	12	60	129
Hostels	13	59	218
Apartments	15	25	32
Bungalows	41	374	768
Total	499	7.077	11.811
Sharr Mountain Region**	88	1.297	2.593

*) Hotel statistics ASK 20121; **) Hotel statistics ASK 2022

In addition to the dimension expressed in numbers, tourism development in Kosovo incorporates other dimensions that are just as important. **Tourists have varied interests: *outdoor activities and biodiversity, the culture of the country, its architecture, gastronomy, history, spiritual heritage, or cultural events***. As a complex sector, the successful management of a tourism destination is closely linked to the collaboration of different stakeholders at the regional and municipal levels.

2. Analyses

2.1. Tourism resources in Sharr Region, specifically in the Brezovica area

The term tourist resource means attractive natural and cultural resources and goods, ie elements of the spatial system, which have a stimulating effect on tourist movements, to satisfy a wide range of tourist needs and create the desired tourist product.

Attractive properties of a tourist resource, are the properties of resources that make it possible to satisfy tourist needs, which are called attractive properties, and they can be:

- Recreational – Sports, outdoor activities, health
- Curious - Exploration,
- Sights – Landscapes, photographing, monuments,
- Aesthetic – Gorges, valleys, flora.

Kosovo has a good potential for tourism development. It has abundant natural resources, within a convenient geographical layout. Some of the special tourist resources relied on distinctive morphological, hydrographic, and climatic features, and other attractive elements, which make Kosovo one of the most attractive tourist spaces in the region.

Due to its wealth of diversified natural resources, Kosovo has outstanding natural potential and other opportunities for the development of almost all forms of tourism, in the range of **outdoor, winter-sports tourism, mountain, health, cultural and urban, transit, education, and business tourism, etc.**

2.1.1. Diversities of natural heritage and its protection level in Brezovica Sharr Mountains

2.1.1.1. Great Natural Potentials and Resources of Sharr Mountains

Shar/Sharr Mountain massif extends from the northeast to the southwest for 80 km with a total surface area of around 1,600 km, making it one of the largest massifs in the Balkans, of which 43.12% belong to Kosovo. Sharr Mountain massif belongs to the group of the young mountain chain and is characterized by a mountainous climate with cold winters and pleasant summers. At an average of 1,300 m, the snow averages a depth of 1 m and usually lasts for four months. The Eyes of the Sharr Mountain, as its glacial lakes are popularly known, are its special characteristic. The water potential of this massif is huge and it has over 200 springs (the whole massif) of pure water. Among others, the mineral richness is represented by manganese, iron, chrome, molybdenum, and copper.

Unique Biodiversity of Sharr Mountains

The massif is very rich in flora and fauna. It has an abundance of high-mountain pasture and high-trunk conifer woods. Fir and juniper trees are most common, and in the lower parts, beech and chestnut forests are plentiful. Sharr Mountains is a large massif that features a variety of habitats, home to around 2,000 different plant species, with nearly 200 endemic and sub-endemic plant taxa. This mountain is an important Balkan and European center for floral endemism.

The flora of Sharr Mountain is very diverse and interesting. Here you can see species from the arctic and sub-Mediterranean regions. The arctic species are unique, in that they originated from a former geological epoch – and are known as glacial relicts. Sharr Mountain is a perfect home for some of these glacial relicts that adapted to survive in harsh weather conditions such as cold winds and snow throughout most of the year.

The fauna of Sharr Mountain has over 44 species of wild animals, which are present on this mountain, including the critically endangered Balkan Lynx, bear, wolf, and Balkan chamois. Eagles, falcons, and hawks are also common on Sharr Mountain. Although not numerous as in the 50-70-es of the last century, the mountain pastures are still grazed by the domestic breed of sheep. They are guarded by the widely known ‘Qeni Sharrit’/Šarplaninac - Sharr Mountain Dog (‘Deltari Ilir’), ***a shepherd dog with excellent characteristics*** – Temperament: Reliable, Devoted, Intelligent, Stubborn, Independent, Protective, Calm, which is a symbol of this mountain and is named after it.

Some facts about the development history of Sharr National Park*)

Sharr was declared a National park in Former YU, by the Kosovo Assembly by a special law 11/86 in 1986**). The area of the National Park includes 39,000 ha. The new Law no. 03/1L-087 in 2013, increased the Park area to 53,469 ha. The national park lies in the territories of five south Kosovo municipalities: Prizren, Dragash, Shtërpce, Kaçanik, and Suhareka. The land cover structure of the Park is as follows: herbaceous vegetation 30,904.85 ha or 57.81%, forests 18,298.82 ha (34.22%), bush 1,419.15 ha (2.65%), water 1,467.64 ha (2.74%), wasteland surfaces 1,355.33 ha (2.54%) and urban areas 23.21 ha (0.04%).

The Sharr Mountain National Park is managed by the Directorate of the National Park based in Prizren***), which operated within the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), as part of the Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency.

Sharr Mountain Activities

The Directorate of Sharr Mountain National Park performs all functions related to the sustainable management of natural resources related to planning, organization, management, and control. The main activities within the management of natural resources are the protection and development of natural resources, research and study of natural values, rational and sustainable use of natural resources, and completion of legal, organizational, and financial infrastructure for sustainable management of the National Park, etc.

*) AMMK the Agency for the Environment Protection of Kosovo, link. <https://www.ammk-rks.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/Dokumente%202022/Themelimi%20dhe%20veprimtaria.pdf>

**) Sharr National Park, Directorate for the Administration of National Park “Sharri”, Information

Brochure, 2017.

***)) AMMK <https://www.ammk-rks.net/en/drejtore/30/drejtoria-parku-kombetar-sharr>

Some facts about the development history of Brezovica and Štrpce/Shtërpce municipality area

- The municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce is located in the southern and south-eastern parts of Kosovo, about 72 km south of Pristina.
- It borders the municipalities of Prizren, Suhareka/Suva Reka, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Kaçanik, and Northern Macedonia.
- On an area of 247.36 km², there are 16 settlements on both sides of the Lepenci River, at an altitude of 600 to 1,200 meters.
- The region shows the continuity of life and the constant existence of settlements in the same places, which often had the same name as it does today.
- The emergence of mining colonies changed the appearance of the district Sirinička/Syrinika and has an impact on the development of other settlements in the valley, mainly the settlements of Verbeštica/Verbeshtica and Štrpce/Shtërpce.
- The development of tourism in the 1950s and the construction of hotel facilities in the 1980s led to the transformation of Brezovica into a tourist and recreational center with an area over the weekend, and Štrpce/Shtërpce as a local center.

Evaluation level of natural resources of Sharr Mountains and Brezovica

- **Gorges, canyons, and caves** are attractive relief forms with tourist motifs. *The aesthetics and curiosity of the gorges make them extremely attractive for tourism.* Sharr massif Mountains are the richest regions with gorges, caves, and canyons. The most popular in this region are:
 - **Prizren or Lumbardhi Gorge**, Brod Canyon, Drini Canyon, etc. Lumbardhi Gorge with its natural beauty is the most attractive gorge in the region and beyond.
- **Valleys in Brezovica and Sharr Mountains:** Syrinika/Sirinika Valley, Zhupa or Lumbardhi Valley, Opoja Valley, Gora Valley, and Lepenci Valley.
- **Hydrographic Resources** are a very important element of a country's natural heritage. Through surface and groundwater can be shown the natural complex of geological composition, relief, climate, flora, and fauna as well as human activity for the adaptation and use of hydrographic elements, to meet various needs.
- **Underground and surface waters in the Brezovica area**
 - **Groundwater:** The distribution of groundwater resources is highly variable. According to the geological structure, the important strata outcrops are located in the valleys of Muržica/Murzhica and Miloštica/Miloshtica, but also in all the river valleys, with little chance of outcrops. The thickness of moraine sediment varies between 2-5 m and more in Murzhica and Miloštica valleys.
 - **Surface waters:** On the Surface map, the hydrographic network consists of Lepenac/Lepenci and its subsidiaries, which are separated by importance: Verbeshtica, Drini River, Blateshtica, Miloshtica, and Sušica/Sushica River. The density of the hydrographic network is quite variable from 0.91 to 2.53 km / km².
 - **Rivers and the natural activity that rivers have** in their valleys, also serve for the development of tourism.
 - ✓ The tourism importance of rivers, in addition to the focus on their use for bathing, and the development of sports, such as swimming, fishing, canoeing, etc., those with canyons, gorges, and waterfalls that they have, present attractive attributes for tourism development.
 - ✓ Kosovo Rivers are known for their attractiveness and natural aesthetics, which can be used for tourism development, like rivers in Brezovica and Sharr Mountains, with their stunning natural attractiveness, are quite interesting attractions for tourists, namely Lepenci, Lumbardhi,
 - **Lakes**, there are in almost all geographical areas and at different altitudes, which are important for

tourism development, especially in continental countries, which have no sea. By type, lakes are divided into:

- ✓ **Relict (Artificial) lakes.**
- ✓ **Glacial lakes** are the most beautiful of all kinds because they are found in mountainous areas and are an integral part of the attractions of mountain massifs. Kosovo is rich in these two types of lakes. Glacial lakes in Kosovo are mostly found in the Bjeshket e Nemuna (Accursed Mountains) and the Sharr Mountains:
- ✓ In **Sharr Mountains there are 16 lakes**, the most famous:
 - Meadow Lake
 - Lake Bogovinje
 - Black Lake
 - Lake Jazhica
 - Upper Lake etc.

2.2. The protection level of the natural resources in Brezovica and Sharr Tourist Region

Sharr National Park and its protection role

The protection level of the Brezovica and Sharr Mountains needs to be treated within the protection of Sharr National Park, to which they belong. **Legislation and documents, regulating the National Park Sharri:**

- Law on "Sharri" National Park no. 04/L-087; Dt. 13.12.2012. (GZRK No. 2/2013);
- Law on Nature Protection 03/L-233 dated 30.09.2010. (GZRK No. 85/2010.);
- Law on Environmental Protection no. 03/L025; Dt. 26.02.2009.
- Decision on the establishment of the Directorate of KP "Sharri" no. 344/13 dated 11.02.2013.
- Regulation on the internal order of national parks no. 21/2013.
- Spatial Plan of the "Sharri" National Park (Decision of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo no. 04-V-772, February 2014)
- Management Plan of KP "Sharri" (Decision of the Minister of MESP No. 18, March 2015)
- Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo.

The southern border of the National Park Sharri coincides with the state border of the Republic of Kosovo with North Macedonia and Albania, which passes through the peaks of the highest Mountains, most of them over 2500 m above sea level. Çuka e Liqenit (2604 m), Bistra (2651 m), Maja e Zezë (2584 m), Koblica (2526 m), etc.

Based on the Spatial Plan, 15 strict nature reserves with an area of 9,363.51 ha (17.5%) are defined in the Sharr National Park: Luboteni, Bistra, Lumbardhi, Dupnice, Kobilice, Gryka (Gorge), Maja Arnenit (Prevalla), Oshlak/Ošlak, Pisha e Madhe, Rusenica, Pashallare, Lendina e Shenjtë, Koritniku, Bredhiku, Shutmani-Vraca-Rudoka. Besides the Law and Spatial Plan of Sharr National Park, as well as dozens of other laws related to Sustainable Principles at the Kosovo level, the protection level of the region, especially the Brezovica area, is seemingly at the lowest possible level. The multiple problems have been present for a quite long period, which contribute to the continuous destruction of the resources with illegal constructions, specifically in Muržica Valley. **The basic problem is the lack of Regulative planning and inter-ministerial inaction at the central level.** The **second problem is the lack of coordination between the relevant Ministry, the National Park of Sharr, and Strpce Municipality**, specifically on the process of issuing the construction permissions, according to the Law of the National Park of Sharri. Contrary to other municipalities, the **Strpce Municipality decides about construction procedures and permissions on its own**. The worst situation is at the Murzhica Valley in Brezovica, starting from the regional road Prizren – Skopje close to Strpce Municipality, where due to the multiple damages, the legal process is ongoing, based on suspicions of the conduction of multiple illegal activities. A similar very low protection level has been observed for quite a long in Prevalla Passage, belonging to Prizren Municipality, which is a different

situation, where the responsible authority is the central ministerial level, in charge of issuing construction permits.

Since the beginning of August 2022, the responsible Prosecutor, in the Legal Process of Brezovica, has started the intensification of the process, with an overwhelming inspection of all constructions in Brezovica, regarding all probable illegal actions.

In both cases, National Park Sharr Directorate is in an impossible situation, due to the ***lack of Regulatory Plans and related measures***, both in the Brezovica and Prevala areas. ***It is thus strongly recommended to prepare and adopt Regulatory Plans, with priority for Brezovica and Prevala, but also for the most degraded or in danger areas of the Sharr National Park.***

The air is contaminated in the urban center of Štrpce. This contamination is caused by smog and dust, as a result of burning home heaters and some smoke from hotels and small businesses.

The water in the river is polluted with untreated waste materials that are not controlled at all. Groundwater is similar. ***The worst damages to the mountain water streams are the small hydro plants***, which represent the worst kind of multiple damaging effects, to the water resources and biodiversity, as well as the scenic damages.

Similarly, the area is also polluted with "wild" waste. The Mayor of the Štrpce Municipality, on this topic, refers to the issue of the municipal public services company, as a delayed process of licensing for which they have applied to the Ministry of the Economy and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP). They are waiting for the licensing, where the subject of this company would as well be the waste collection in the Municipality and Brezovica area.

Regulatory measures help offset negative impacts; for instance, controls on the number of tourist activities and movement of visitors within protected areas can limit impacts on the ecosystem and help maintain the integrity and vitality of the site. Such limits can also reduce the negative impacts on resources, both by chaotic and illegal businesses, as well as resident and nonresident illegally and/or manipulative constructions - villas and Chalets.

2.2.1. Diversities of cultural and historical heritage and its preservation in the Sharr Tourist Region

Kosovo represents a wealthy treasure of ethno-cultural, material, and spiritual heritage of various historical periods, with a high diversity of communities, languages, traditions, and religions, based on extraordinary hospitality.

Kosovo's heritage represents a mosaic of cultures of various historic periods, conditioned under historic, social, economic, and religious circumstances. The entire artistic value as a heritage belongs to various styles and characters, where autochthon inhabitants were the bearers, so Albanians and others who lived in this area. Most important among Cultural heritage: ***Prizren – Museum City***, with its archaeological Fortress, Old Serbian Orthodox Monastery, Serbian churches, Old Catholic Church, Ottoman style heritage like mosques, Old Hamam, old houses, and bridges;

Anthropogenic tourist resources are anthropogenic elements of the spatial system, whose properties can be valorized for the needs of tourism. They arose and are emerging, as a result of the material and spiritual culture of the society in space and time. Anthropogenic tourist resources are divided into:

- Ethnographic
- Artistic
- Ambient and landscape
- Events
- Specially built (recreational and entertainment) attractions.

The primary Cultural and historic Resources in Sharr Tourist Region and Brezovica

There is no place in Kosovo and the Region, like the Sharr Tourism Region, with its unique cultural heritage mosaic, of all kinds of diversities, of Dardanian, Roma, Byzantine, Serbian Orthodox, Ottoman, and Albanian cultural, lingual, arts, and crafts, religion, and languages.

- **Built Heritage in Prizren and the whole Sharr Mountain Tourist Region** – Prizren Fortress; Old Archeological Byzantine Site in the Gorge of Prizren, actually under the administration of the Serbian Church ‘Monastery of Holly Archangels’; Shën e Premta Church/Bogorodica Levishka in Prizren (originally built between the 6 – 8th Century AD) UNESCO listed; Ottoman Heritage Mosques, Bridges, Gazi Mehmet Pasha Hamam, and Mosque; Prizren League, Ethnological Museum; Sinan Pasha Mosque; Old Prizren Town; Serbian Orthodox Church of Saint George; Catholic Church; Serbian Orthodox Church of Savior; Sufi Tekkes – Halvety Tekke; Old traditional Stone Houses Gornje Selo Mountain Village; Old Stone Houses in villages, with Serbian, Albanian and Gorani Community, in Zhupa Valley and Strpce Municipality; Serbian Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist “Crkva Svetog Jovana Krstitelja” in Brezovica.
- **Brezovica and Strpce Municipality** are interested to upgrade the protection level of the cultural and historical resources and values, categorizing them into several important levels, **in the List of protected and evicted cultural objects:**
 - a. **The Cultural heritage of special importance:**
 - ✓ Castle on Brezovica - Chajlia, Brezovica
 - ✓ Church of Saint Nicholas from the 16th century, Gotovuša
 - ✓ Church of Saint Nicholas from the 16th century, Šterpce/Shtërpca
 - b. **The Cultural heritage of great importance:**
 - ✓ Stone tablet with a grave in the Church of St. George, Gornje/Bitia e Epërme
 - ✓ Church of Saint Theodore from the 16th century, Donja/Bitija e Poshtme.
- **Spiritual Heritage and Traditional Arts and Handicrafts** – Silver or Filigree crafts in Prizren; Other arts and handicrafts products offered as souvenirs for tourists in Prizren, Brezovica, and all tourist places; Unique Bride`s Face Decoration in Reçani/Rečane in Zhupa or Lumbardhi Valley; Pehlivan Game Competitions in Dragash, among Gorani, Bosnian and Albanian communities; Family religious festivities among the different communities; Shëngjergji as an archaic tradition since the Dardanian pagan period among Albanians, and Gorani community, Đurđevdan among Serbian community.

2.3. The approach to opportunities for Sustainable tourism development in the Brezovica zone

Considering the high need to address the economic, social, and environmental challenges on one hand and promote sustainable development on the other, 6 stakeholders joined forces in 2018 to organize the biggest event of sustainable development in Kosovo. The initiative marked the beginning of the event named **Kosovo Sustainable Development Week (KSDW)**, which has become an annual event due to its immense success and influence on public opinion.

Through its carefully designed activities, KSDW aims to enhance the public dialogue for sustainable development in Kosovo and the region, encourage the faster implementation of a sustainable development framework and reassure coordination amongst the stakeholders in the field.

This Research Paper is a research document, which aims to show the actual situation of sustainable tourism in Brezovica, Sharr Mountains, exchanging views and opportunities with related stakeholders, with the final intention to excerpt the overwhelming recommendation, for both immediate, short-term, and mid-term action and activities of central and local government, and all related stakeholders. A specific recommendation will be oriented toward the preservation of natural resources, cultural and historic heritage, and values, as well as the specific orientation on the next planning and development phases of sustainable

mountain tourism, based on the great opportunities offered by Brezovica and other areas of the Sharr Mountains.

Sustainable Tourism, definition, concept, and types

Tourism development must be based on sustainability criteria, be long-term bearable economically and ethically, and be socially equitable for the local populations of the destinations.

The European Commission has adopted its definition of sustainable tourism, which is „any form of development, improvement or tourism activity that respects the environment, preserves in the long term the natural and cultural resources and is socially and economically durable and equitable”.

Sustainable tourism allows the development of tourism and recreation activities in a country, region, or tourist destination, by taking into account the basic principles of sustainable development, showing respect for the environment, the people and the economy, and the local culture of the tourist receiving region.

From a social point of view, sustainable tourism refers to the attempt to focus as much as possible on the local human universe, to understand the local preoccupations, to appreciate local values, and the depth of customs and traditions in the respective areas.

Sustainable Tourism forms, identified by the literature, are numerous: ecological tourism (ecotourism), green tourism, soft tourism, rural tourism and agrotourism, community tourism, solidarity, and responsible tourism, all these forms were developed opposing traditional, mass tourism.

Sustainable tourism is considered to be that form of tourism that favors long-term management of resources in such a manner that the economic and social needs be met, maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biodiversity, and vital needs feedback systems. Sustainable tourism products function at the local level in harmony with the environment, the community, and local cultures.

2.3.1. New trends creating mountain tourism potential

Some trends could stimulate an increase in mountain tourism both in the winter and summer seasons. They rather reflect changes that profoundly affect daily life in the long run.

- ***Mountain tourism is no longer booming in traditional mountain countries.*** New forms of mountain tourism characterized as multi-segmented and multi-niche tourism is on the rise.
- ***Mountain tourism is no longer bound to the skiing week in the winter and the three weeks of family summer holidays,*** more diversified spectrum of indoor and outdoor facilities, on the other hand, has made mountain tourism a year-round form of tourism.
- ***The health and fitness megatrend*** has stimulated activities and sports that correspond to the outdoor boom.
- ***Urban populations within the vicinity of mountain chains are caring more about the protection of mountain wilderness and landscapes.***
- ***Additionally, investors from rich countries spend billions of dollars on the rejuvenation of traditional summer mountain resorts and their spas. Both Brezovica and wider Sharr Mountain National Park, are getting the first FDI Investments,*** like the Investments from the Arab Emirates in Lumbardhi Valley, (the Feasibility and Concept Development prepared, waiting for Permission to start the Investment phase).
- ***The impact of global warming in Alpine regions*** has caused average temperatures to be three times higher than in the surrounding flatlands, according to scientists. The upside is that with mountain summers becoming warmer and lasting longer, summer activities can be promoted.
- ***The rise of global temperatures increasingly turns into a serious development obstacle for***

winter tourism in mountain areas. The minimum depth of snow cover which allows for a skiing season of 100–120 days is increasing. The total number of days that permit skiing has been decreasing in the Alps for many years.

- ***Changing supply structures and new visitors' behavior in traditional mountain countries***

Besides the new market conditions which depend on exogenous influences on the demand side, there is also an ongoing change in the supply structures of mountain tourism in traditional mountain countries. These structures have influenced visitor behavior.

Influence of new market structures on visitor behavior

<i>Changing supply structures</i>	<i>New visitors' behavior</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Easier accessibility of</i> mountain resorts for visitors; – More secondary homes; – New leisure sports activities; and – New Alpine wellness and entertainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Shorter stays, more weekend stays, and excursions; – People combining work and leisure; – More younger sports people; and – More couples and singles.

2.3.2. Situation of sustainable tourism in the touristic zone of Brezovica Sharr Mountains

The actual situation and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Brezovica need to be tackled in several main phases or fields:

- Touristic potentials, attractions, and resources of Brezovica and Sharr Mountains.
- Identification of the investment sources for sustainable tourism development.
- A Strategic Approach to the investment opportunities in the Planning and Development of the former **SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina**.
- A Strategic Approach to the investment opportunities in the Planning and Development of Mountain Summer/Winter tourism in the Brezovica area.

2.3.2.1. Touristic potentials, attractions, and resources of Brezovica and Sharr Mountains

Both Brezovica and the wider area of the Sharr Mountains are the most attractive areas, blessed with their natural and Cultural-Historic Resources, within a wide area of Sharr National Park, famous urban centers like Prizren, and picturesque mountain villages with their both natural and cultural specific characteristics.

Natural attractions, like forests, mountain pastures, water flows, glacial lakes, climate, aesthetic landscapes, attractive terrains for skiing and winter sports, all-year recreation and outdoor experiences, health recuperation and recreation, geographical position, very rich and various cultural-historic heritage, as well as the great wealth of local communities' uniqueness and their experience, enable the potentials and primary resources, for the development of various forms of tourism throughout the year. Namely, the most important recommended forms would be: mountain tourism, winter ski sports and recreation, summer vacations, weekend and daily excursions, health and indoor/outdoor recreation tourism, community-based tourism, rural and agro-tourism, convention and business tourism, adventure, research and exploration tourism, social and workers tourism.

2.3.4.1. The brief history of the existing SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina

Following the great success of the development of the Mountain Centers - Resorts in Slovenia, B&H, and Serbia of Former YU, as well as Europe and globally, and the great opportunities offered by the Brezovica location and its community at the end of the 1970s and 1980s, several hospitality and skiing structures were constructed and the SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina enterprise was operationalized, one of the most attractive Ski sports, Event and Weekend centers in former YU and at the regional level. Even though the focus was

on mass skiing sports, due to the location, access, and attraction of the different segments of the regional market, Hotel ‘Narcis’, one of the best hotels in the Balkan region, operated as a multiple task and function hotel throughout the year, attracting domestic and regional segments of visitors: winter skiing, convention, weekend, event, business, and health tourism, and all-season mass tourism, and later started offering services for inbound tourism segments of outdoor activities and mountain tourism.

2.3.4.2. The situation and development opportunities of the SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica

Unfortunately, due to the specific historical circumstances, the lack of care and investments, security reasons during the pre-war, war, and post-war periods in Kosovo, and the hesitation of the privatization process, the actual situation of the SOE ‘Ski Center’ is extremely poor, being either demolished (Hotel ‘Breza’) highly degraded and out of operation (accommodation and all supplementary functions in Hotel ‘Narcis’), or very poor standards and low scale of operation in quite degraded Hotel ‘Molika’, operated with about 30% of its low standard capacities seasonally (only accommodation and F&B services during the ski season).

The legal status of SOE Enterprise: *Direct Administration by the Privatization Agency of Kosovo PAK*, according to the Kosovo Law on Privatization, with an interim ***Joint Board*** both by the Kosovo Government, represented by PAK, and the municipality of Štrpce. The ongoing selection process of the Management of the SOE.

The installed and actual situation of the hospitality capacities of SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica

Hotels structures- the situation and use levels	Accommodation capacities				F&B Services		Area m ² Capacity use %
	Rooms		Beds		Seats		
	Built	Existing	Built	Exist.	Built	Exist.	
Hotel Narcis – - Accommodation - not operational - F&B service capacities (rare use – events) - Conference room - Recreation hall - Bowling hall - Swimming pool - Sauna - Fitness (Billiard, table tennis, etc.) - TV Room - Meeting room - Other facilities (Post off. Bank, Shop)	175 - - 25-45 pers. 15-20 pers. 12-16 pers. 10 pers. 8-12 pers. 50 pers. 30 pers. standard	0 - - 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	320 - - - - - - - - - - -	0 - - - - - - - - - - -	- 700 300 40 15 15 - - 50 30 -	- 400 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 -	14800 m² Min. 0% 0% 0% 0% 0% 0% 0% 0% 0% 0%
Hotel Molika*) – - Accommodation – seasonally use - Restaurant - Express Restaurant - Disco Bar - TV Room - Fitness (Billiard, table tennis, etc.) - Ski service	100 - - - - - -	50 - - - - - -	300 - - - - - -	150 - - - - - -	- 300 120 25 30 15 -	- 200 - 0 15 - - -	10000 m² 50% 60% 0% 0% 15% 0% -
Hotel Breza, in a demolished state	-	-	-	-	-	-	2500 m²; 0%
Small hut “Mala Brvnara” – rented	-	-	-	-	-	-	35 m²; 0%
Stojkova Kuća/ Stojku's house – rented	-	-	-	-	-	-	165 m²; 0%
Building "Titova Vila" - administration	-	-	-	-	-	-	200 m²; 0%

*) ***Skiing infrastructure:*** Built and installed 5 cable cars in the ski center, of which 2 are working (one is 1420 meters long and the other is 1350 meters long), while 3 are not working. There are also 5 ski lifts, of

which 1 works (with a length of 300 meters) and 4 are out of operation. There are also 2 cabins for transporting tourists (with a length of 100 to 150 meters).

Taking into consideration the first-class tourism natural resources, existing high demand at the domestic, regional, and international markets for Mountain all-season tourism experiences, as well as the vibrant interest and potential of the local community and their businesses, *the priority* would be *the Rejuvenation of the SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica*, bringing together on the same interest line, a central and local institution, all other relevant stakeholders, with the priority of the interest of the local community.

2.3.5. Identification of the investment sources for the sustainable tourism development

Traditionally, Winter Sports Tourism in mountainous areas was a priority, which started at the beginning of the 1970s in France and central European countries (Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, etc.). In recent decades, the priorities are focusing on Mountain Tourism Development, with the new Resorts, designed, equipped, and operated for all four seasons, with a high degree of economic interest and sustainability. In the same way, Kosovo should aim for the mid and long-term orientation, planning, investment, and development of Mountain Tourism.

In the situation of the highly degraded assets and minimum functioning of their capacities, **SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina**, in the immediate term, could make efforts to upgrade the capacities in Hotel Molika, probably in Hotel Narcis as well, to save the use of their capacities in Ski Season January – April 2023, with the possibilities to continuing the use of services and some functions, after the end of the Ski season. In the short and mid-terms SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina, supported by the Private Agency of Kosovo PAK, the municipality, and donors, need to make efforts to prepare the upgrading of capacities and functions through the restructuring of the new Mountain Resort Brezovica, both in Hotel Molika and Hotel Narcis, at the first phase, for the use during all four seasons, changing the actual name “Ski Center Brezovica” to “Mountain Resort Brezovica”.

2.3.4. Strategic approach to the investment opportunities in the Planning and Development of the former SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina

Recommendation - Development orientation of the SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina

Development orientation, planning, and investments in the Tourism Zone of Brezovica

According to the existing situation and development modalities, there are several probable regulation and investment modalities for the whole tourism zone Brezovica, including:

- 1. Investment in immediate and short-term interventions:**
 - a. *Immediate and short-term intervention*** and maintenance investments in the SOE/NSH Inex Sharr Planina,
 - b. *Legalization and standardization of the private hospitality and catering businesses*** in Brezovica:
 - The Institutional, both central and municipal, orientation and collaboration on the legalization and standardization of the private hospitality and catering businesses in Brezovica,
 - c. *Feasibility Study – The Community Based Tourism Development*** (Agro, Rural, and Eco-tourism), donor`s investment support,
 - d. *Institutional and donors support for community tourism development,***
 - e. Preparation of the Training Program for the Community based, Agro, and Rural Tourism,**
 - f. Incorporation and collaboration with the responsible stakeholders of the ‘High Scardus Trail’ Project,**

- g. **Preparation of the documentation** (Teaching Standard, Education Program, and Curricula) and facilities for the **Professional Dual Education and Training (Hospitality; Gastronomy, and Tourism and Travel)** on 4th and 5th levels of the Kosovo Education System, **investors: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and donors**,
 - h. **Preparation and starting of the Professional Dual Education** (Hospitality; Tourism and Travel) for the school year 2023 – 2024, on the 4th and 5th levels of the Kosovo education system. **Investor: Kosovo budget and donors**.
2. **Investment in mid-term tourism development and expansion of Brezovica** as a tourism destination.
- a. **Feasibility Study – New Development Phase of the ‘Ski Center Brezovica’;**
 - b. **Preparation of the Tourism Development Plan of the ‘Mountain Resort Brezovica’;**
 - c. **Preparation of the Tendering Documentation on the ‘Mountain Resort Brezovica’;**
 - d. **Preparation and activation of the Regulatory Plan for the Investments on ‘Mountain Resort Brezovica’;**
 - e. **Tendering Process of the existing assets and land use of the ‘Mountain Resort Brezovica’**
 - f. **Investor Selection and preparatory documents and activities of the new ‘MOUNTAIN RESORT BREZOVICA’.**
 - g. **Investment phase of the new ‘Resort Center Brezovica’**
 - h. **Start of the Operation of the Mountain Resort Brezovica’.**

2.3.4.1. Preparation of the SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica for the higher operational and standard level

The preparation of the **SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica** for the higher operational and standard level should take into consideration the overall challenges: the status, the outdated construction standards, the destruction and degraded level of the hospitality and skiing structures, the changing market demands, not trained actual staff, which needs to learn and to be trained to welcome and serve various visitors, having in mind the constant cooperation and coexistence with the local communities, their potential, and opportunities.

In that respect, the overall mosaic of stakeholders, central and local authorities, Privatization Agency of Kosovo, Sharr Mountain National Park Administration Directorate, local community, local and regional NGO-s, as well as other actors, should take necessary actions towards adequate activities, actions, and changes. In that respect, the sector expertise is quite necessary, in the preparation of the Planning and Development Documents, for:

2.3.5. Strategic approach to the investment opportunities in the Planning and Development of the Mountain Summer/Winter tourism in the Brezovica area

Recommendation – the *New comprehensive Mountain Tourism Development Brezovica area*

Investment in long-term or strategic planning and development:

- a. **Preparation and design of the Master Plan** for the Strategic planning and tourism expansion in Brezovica;
 - **For a new comprehensive Mountain Tourism Development**, including multiple functioning operations: Winter and Ski; Summer and around the year unique ecosystem experiences; healthy indoor & outdoor, recreation and curative activities; Outdoor Activities: mountaineering, hiking, trekking and biking, gliding sports; Events: Convention, business presentation, family events; seminars, education, and training activities, etc.

- *Public Discussion of the Master Plan with all interested stakeholders*
- *Approval of the Master Plan of Brezovica Mountain Tourism Expansion*
- b. *Preparation and activation of the Regulatory Plan for the Investments in Tourism Expansion of the Tourism Zone of Brezovica;*
- c. *Tendering Process of the sustainable tourism expansion and development in Brezovica tourism zone, the First Phase*
- d. *Investor Selection and preparatory documents and activities of the new Mountain Resort in the Brezovica tourism zone.*
- e. *Investment phase of the new Mountain Resort Center Brezovica – 2;*
- f. *Start of the Operation of the new Mountain Resort Brezovica - 2’.*

The main assets of the mountain tourism market are its four seasons and its strong home market

The products within the improved hospitality and ski infrastructure need to be promoted and offered to the domestic market and Kosovo diaspora, which is quite interested in Brezovica, during the winter holidays, but far more during the Summer Vacation and holidays during the rest of the year. In addition, thanks to the relatively short distance, good road, and air connectivity, as well as the traditional links, the mountain tourism market of Brezovica and Sharr mountains can count on regional demand, such as various visitor segments from Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Greece, and Turkey. In that respect, along with the substantial financial support for the assets upgrading, all responsible factors should focus on the ***publicity and marketing strategies***, with ***appropriately designed, planned, and developed products***. All that needs support both by the central and local government, as well as the international donor agencies in all planning phases. This destination development philosophy should be in line with resource preservation, and excellent cooperation with the local communities; finally, the investment needs to be based on public-private partnerships including central and local governments.

Public administrations play a crucial role in stimulating mountain tourism growth since independent entrepreneurship and local initiatives have become scarce in poor mountain regions.

The role of sustainable mountain tourism in promoting poverty alleviation

Sustainable tourism - Besides the preservation of natural resources, a common trait for all tourism that aims at environmental compatibility, as well as human health protection, this type of tourism has other purposes:

- ***Social purposes*** (respect for customs, traditions, social and family structures of the local population), and on the other hand,
- ***Economic purposes*** (equitable revenue distribution, tourism offer diversification). As a component of sustainable tourism, ***Soft tourism*** sets itself away from the artificial and impersonal forms of mass tourism.

Sustainable tourism in mountains can contribute to creating additional and alternative livelihood options and ***promoting poverty alleviation***, social inclusion, as well as landscape and biodiversity conservation. It is a way to preserve the natural, cultural and spiritual heritage, promote local crafts and high-value products, and celebrate many traditional practices such as local festivals.

2.4. The approach to opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Brezovica Sharr Mountains

2.4.1. Interregional and cross-border tourism development opportunities

2.4.1.1. Transnational Project ‘High Scardus Trails’

To create income for the local population, stop the abandonment of the mountain region of Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania, and bring these parts of the region closer together, the national and local tourism

organizations and hiking clubs joined forces with the German Development Cooperation GTZ to develop very attractive new regional **Outdoor Project “High Scardus Trails”**, recently developed at Sharr Mountains. The Trail goes along the highest mountains at the triangle borders of Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania, with the possibility of incorporation of further steps and travel experiences in ‘Via Dinarica’ famous Outdoor Project. These excursions and tours are organized by mountaineering and outdoor associations and mountaineering travel organizers, mainly from Kosovo, with domestic visitors, foreign tourists, and foreigners working and residing in Kosovo. Some of the travel organizers in Sharr Mountains and Brezovica: ‘Sharr Ecotours’, ‘High Scardus Ultra’ ‘Kosovo Outdoor Pass’ ‘HIKINGNJERI’ ‘Paragliding Kosova’, ‘Group 04 - Downhill Bike Trail 04’, ‘Kosovo Rocks – Jazhinca Lake’, ‘Nomad - Hiking-Ljuboten Peak in the Sharr Mountains.

Sustainable tourism initiatives – ECO and Agro-Tourism

In Lepenci Valley within the Strpce Municipality, several Agricultural projects are ongoing, with the support of International donors and subsidies by the Ministry of Agriculture of Kosovo, cultivating berry fruits, as well as cooperating with the Wild Berry Fruits collection points, the fruits for trade and production of fruit juices, jams and other sweets. Supported by the supportive agencies and institutions, **USAID, and SIRE projects**, the **Sharr Berry Strpce, 99 Lule - Çajra Organike** (healthy Herbal and Fruit Collection), aims to offer these fruits and products to the visitors in Brezovica and other tourist centers in Kosovo. These business activities will be incorporated within the initiation of various sustainable tourism forms, Agro Tourism, Community tourism, and Rural Tourism. Specific consideration should be taken, related to ***the level of damage to the flora species, and the wild berries that are collected in the Sharr mountains in an uncontrolled manner (the way they are collected and the amount)***, which will result in the gradual disappearance of these valuable flora species. **This practice should be looked at carefully, being the basic principle of sustainable and Eco and Agro tourism.**

2.4.1.2. Very important touristic locations for education and social tourism development

In Former YU, the Center of Social Care or Pensioners Home/Dom Penzionera was built and functioned in Brezovica, in a very favorable location, near the Magistral road, with appropriate accommodation and F&B services capacities, which functioned for decades, later to be inhabited by refugees (due to the war in Croatia, and perhaps later IDP from Kosovo). There is also the holiday resort for children called ‘Lahor’ which was built during the 90s and was used as a holiday resort for pupils of Kosovo. Both structures are empty and out of use, which could be a good potential for Social Tourism and Education/Youth Tourism exchange.

The former workers’ vacation camp, which at that time of its operation, served as an example of Social Tourism, needs to be activated again, as well as the pupil’s holiday resort, normally operating with the approach and needs of Social and Youth Tourism guests and visitors. The location is owned by the Ministry of the Social Care of Kosovo and could be in the soonest terms prepared for Feasibility study, offering it at the level of International Tendering, according to the Kosovo Law on Strategic Investments. Besides the social component, the Center can support and offer its services to different organized groups and individual tourists, mountaineering tourists, visiting Brezovica and Sharr Mountain, offering valuable sustainable tourism activities, with popular and favorable prices.

2.4.1.3. The special form of Family Tourism - Renting free capacities in Houses, Chalets, and Villas

Almost all over Kosovo, specifically in the mountain ranges of the Sharr Mountains, their Mountain Villages, a significant number of families spend the summer season in diverse mountain areas, within spacious houses, as well as specifically designed mountain accommodation types - huts or mountain chalets.

Unfortunately, there are many cases of illegal construction ignoring the proper adjustment of the reconstruction/construction to the environment, with a strong negative impact on the environment, biodiversity, and natural landscaping protection.

The greatest number of the reconstructed mountain huts or chalets can be used as an alternative form of accommodation, during the hiking season, and as a form of community-based accommodation, for domestic and regional visitors, for Kosovo Diaspora during summer vacations, with half board or even full board services.

2.4.2. Tourism contribution to Environmental Conservation

The tourism industry can contribute to environmental conservation in several forms:

- a. Financial Contributions
 - Direct financial contributions
 - Contributions to government revenues National Park's ranger salaries and park maintenance
- b. Improved Environmental Management and Planning
- c. Environmental Awareness Raising
- d. Protection and Preservation
- e. Regulatory Measures.

2.5. Sustainable tourism development through Natural Resources Protection

2.5.1. Tourism Protected zoning in Brezovica Sharr Mountains

A *tourism zone* is an area consisting of tourist sites that are closely linked in terms of nature, history, culture, or otherwise. A tourism zone is designed to enable longer-stay travel of more than 2 nights and 3 days through cooperation among its tourism sites, with the larger goal of enhancing the attractiveness of these sites.

Protecting specifically defined Tourism Zones in the Brezovica area, National Park Sharri is a necessary process and should have happened decades before. It is a fact the Brezovica area, has very rich and diversified natural resources, which so far, due to inadequate political will, and the lack of respect for the law, is suffering multiple damages up to the very high level of degradation of the environment and its biodiversity.

2.5.2. Regulatory Planning and measures

According to the legislation in force in Kosovo, construction is not possible on a plot that is not defined by a completed detailed regulatory plan. Therefore, it is illegal to build new buildings and reconstruct existing ones until the plan is approved. Unfortunately, in the case of Brezovica, the most degraded mountain area, in Kosovo, there is not a single regulatory plan. Therefore, without regulatory plans, all and every constructed unit or whatsoever building is illegal and must be treated as such. The relevant authorities shall take all necessary measures, to stop illegal construction, and stop immediately with the issuing of construction permits. The relevant ministry and municipal authorities shall as soon as possible undertake all necessary planning proceedings and documentary measures, to start with the Regulatory planning in Brezovica and National Park Sharri.

Construction on a plot of land is possible only if that plot is covered by a detailed regulatory plan; because the detailed plan contains the purpose and zone of the plot, positions of traffic infrastructure, regulatory and construction lines, construction parameters, and other data. Based on this data, it is further determined whether it is necessary to create urban planning projects of pre-parceling and parcels to form a building plot.

2.5.3. Community-Based Tourism Development in the Brezovica area Sharr Mountains

Community tourism is focused on involving local populations in a tourism development localized and developed to their benefit: they build and manage the accommodation structures, as well as the local services offered to tourists. Local populations have complete control over tourism-generated revenue, a

great part of the revenue being destined to improve the living conditions of the community, giving special attention to respect for nature and local population traditions. This tourism development form is often combined with production activities development, such as agricultural products transformation or handicraft workshops, whose products are primarily sold to tourists.

Elements of Community Tourism - Local Population

- Accommodation and joint meals in the homes of rural families;
- Benefits from traditional cuisine, traditional arts, and handicrafts;
- Special experiences from the traditional Albanian, Bosnian, Serbian, Turkish, and Gorani gastronomy of the region;
- Benefits from traditional hospitality experiences;
- Active participation in the daily work of the villagers;
- Accommodation and stay in individual country houses, in B&B services (Bed and breakfast);
- Possibilities of accommodation in empty houses, throughout the region;
- Accommodation in hostels and small hotels/motels in the villages of the region;
- Accommodation in old houses renovated in rural areas;
- Individual, family, and group experiences, in eco and agro-tourism organized by individual service providers and travel organizers;
- Activities of a certain type, during the stay in the villages: cycling, fishing, horseback riding, running, walking;
- Research Tours in exploring rural lifestyles and rural farms.

Besides potential and resources, Community Tourism is relatively underdeveloped in Kosovo, probably on its pioneering steps, with some very successful cases and success stories, in a very limited number of cases, mostly in the mountain areas.

3. Conclusions

2.6. Thinking about Tourism Product Development and Sustainable Destination Development

The existence of tourism potentials and resources are substantial factors and preconditions for the development of the tourism industry or a developed tourist destination. This fact is one of the basic preconditions for the development of the tourist product and the tourist destination.

To achieve a necessary level of destination development in a locality, region, municipality, or country, it is of primary importance that the central and local government move towards thinking about Product development, incorporating all relevant stakeholders, and setting an example of how others are acting on new Product development initiatives. The tourism sector needs to be supported with all the possibilities, such as subsidies, lower and reasonable VAT taxes, preferential measures in expansion projects and development of new capacities, incentive measures to attract visitors from the international market, etc. In recent years, the interest of international investors, especially those from the Kosovar Diaspora, in direct investments in the tourism sector has increased, with some concrete examples of investments, but insufficient favorable policies have left local investors without support, demotivating direct investments from external sources, in particular from the Kosovo Diaspora.

The main problems, which demotivate local investors, are banking policies and expensive loans, lack of adequate urban planning, lack of tourist zoning and regulatory plans, and in particular, the demotivating bureaucracy of central and municipal institutions.

To start adequate sustainable tourism and destination planning, development, and management in the Brezovica area, there is a need for coordination of all relevant entities and actors, the relevant ministries of

the Kosovo Government, Private Agency of Kosova PAK, Sharr National Park, Shterpce Municipality, donors and supportive agencies, as well as the other relevant stakeholders, such as Tourist service providers, professional associations and civil society, local community, communities of faith and heritage preservation and cultivation, sector experts, etc.

ANNEX I: Actual unfavorable situation of Tourism Businesses in Kosovo

The unfavorable situation of tourism and hospitality businesses in Kosovo

- Very expensive investments in hotel infrastructure and gastronomy,
- Extreme lack of professional planning and coordination,
- Extreme lack of professional management,
- Significant lack of professional education and training,
- The lack of adequate access to institutions at all levels in providing support to tourist businesses,
- Unfavorable tourism policies at all levels,
- Ignoring business requests and concerns by institutions,
- Significant lack of support for infrastructure investments by the municipal and central government, as well as the donors,
- Sometimes, inconsistent development guidelines of donor support, because of non-professional coordination of their activities, by institutions of Kosovo,
- Besides the natural and cultural resources and the need for community development and well-being, the support for community-based tourism development is inexistent,
- Due to the high scale of the destruction and damage of local natural resources, by illegal construction and Hydro Power Plants, the local communities are losing their basic tourism attractions – biodiversity and water resources,
- Unfavorable policies and difficult access to favorable loans,
- Lack of foreign investment, due to complicated procedures, heavy bureaucracy, and intimidation of potential and interested investors.

4. Recommendations

ANNEX II: Recommendations for all local stakeholders

Recommendations for Kosovo Government and Strpce Municipality, Directorate of the National Park Sharr, Sharr National Park, Privatization Agency of Kosovo PAK, civil society organizations, and citizens of the Brezovica area – Sharr Mountain, as well as the international community donors, on the potential, and the strategies for the development of Sustainable Tourism.

Recommendation for central and local government

- *It is about time for Kosovo Government, International supporting agencies, and all related stakeholders, to take an appropriate approach and give the chance for faster, well-planned, and coordinated Tourism Development of Kosovo, focused, for good reason, on Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development.*
- Public authorities to create a suitable climate and adequate framework for the use of resources and to create a favorable commercial level of scope, stopping the misuse of the municipality land for inadequate construction by the municipality itself,

- ***It is strongly recommended*** as a necessary activity ***the Preparation and adoption of the Regulatory Plans and related measures***, with priority for Brezovica and Prevala, but also for the most degraded or in danger areas of the Sharr National Park.
- To prepare and work on Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development, including all related stakeholders and potential private owners and investors.
- ***To stop and eliminate damage to the mountain water streams by the small hydropower plants***, which represent the worst kind of multiple damaging effects, to the water resources and biodiversity, as well as the scenic damages.
- To take urgent and appropriate steps, against the criminal acts of misuse, misshape, and degradation of nature, buildings of tourist value, in the Sharr Mountains, and the area of the National Park Sharr, caused by the illegal constructions and other illegal activities.
- ***Rejuvenation of the SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica***, bringing together on the same interest line, all stakeholders, specifically the interest of the local community:
 - ***Immediate and Short-term***: return to function in as many capacities as possible, in the conditions of limited opportunities,
 - ***Mid-term actions***: Putting the assets of **SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica** in the "Sovereign Fund" and tendering in Public-Private Partnership Investments, including an active role of the Municipality and Local Community,
 - ***Professional Education Component***: Urgent need and necessity to open a Professional School of Tourism and Hotel Hospitality, in both languages, by the Education System of Kosovo.
- Prepare Government Development Plans in cooperation and coordination with the Municipality and Local Community,
- To take urgent appropriate steps against illegal woodcutting and other damages to the biodiversity of its mountain areas.
- Commission a feasibility study on Integrated Tourism Product Development of the Sustainable Tourism forms (ECO. Community, Rural, and Agro Tourism), including all related stakeholders and professional expertise,
- Promote and support Private – Public partnerships,
- Both at the Municipal level and the Central Government of Kosovo, along with the legal process, it is necessary to start with the Process of Legalization, for all accommodation and catering facilities in private ownership,
- ***Citizens interested to invest in sustainable tourism forms*** need to be assisted and supported with planning, orientation, and investments, by central and municipality authorities, as well as international donors, on their interests and the interest of the sector and overall economic development.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

- Existing and new NGOs to work closely, within the Destination Management Organization DMO, with the owners of legal houses, mountain huts, and chalets, to promote sustainable tourism experiences in all inhabited mountains, offering their alternative accommodation capacities to the local and international tourism market, specifically to the Kosovo Diaspora.
- Civil Society Organizations, together with other stakeholders to be more vocal in raising the concerns about the slow motion and/or inaction of all government ministries, agencies, and inter-ministerial bodies in charge, and call for stopping the illegal construction and misuse of the water and other resources of the National Park Sharr and all other zones where such a concern is a reality.

Recommendation for citizens of Kosovo and Brezovica Sharr Region

- Owners of the available accommodation capacities, to work closer with DMO, travel agencies, and Reservation platforms (Airbnb, etc.), offering their capacities as alternative accommodations, both in the villages and mountain inhabited areas in huts/chalets,

- Owners of traditional Old Houses can offer alternative capacities, either accommodation B&B or their tailored specific products and services, followed by legends and storytelling.
- Citizens and the local community should engage with more focused pressure on authorities, at the local and national level, to stop the criminal actions of damaging and destruction of biodiversity and resources, specifically in Brezovica and Lepenci Valley, such as illegal construction, pollution, and misuse of water sources and streams for small hydro plants, damaging flora, and forest resources, illegal hunting and fishing, etc.,
- Reporting criminal activities by the citizens and civil society need to be encouraged by the authorities in charge. Better cooperation between Kosovo Police and forest guards, with the citizens, should be stimulated and facilitated.
- Citizens, living and staying in Kosovo, should change the over-consuming misuse of the remittances from their family members living abroad, asking for their support in their planning and oriented investment initiatives on sustainable forms of tourism.

Recommendation for the international community donors

The International community donors offered their valuable support to the tourism sector in different forms, in the previous period of over two decades, which in the unfavorable and unprofessional positioning of the Kosovo institutions towards the tourism sector, the lack of planned professional coordination, the support was segmented and not adequately harmonized and coordinated. The private businesses and community-based tourism initiatives, the bearers of the sector's development, were at the end of the support list, both by the state authorities and international donors. The same situation was faced by businesses and community initiatives in the Brezovica area. **Accordingly, we recommend:**

- Taking into consideration the valuable natural, cultural and human resources in Kosovo, as well as the risks of their degradation and loss, all international agencies and donors, ready to offer their support, need to urge the local and state-related authorities, to give priority to the professionally planned and oriented Sustainable tourism development, in Brezovica, Sharr Mountain region and in Kosovo.
- The international donor's support needs to be oriented toward sustainable forms of Mountain tourism, focused on professional consultancy on:
 - Tourism Planning and Development,
 - Foreign Direct Investment opportunities,
 - Destination Development and Management,
 - Professional Education and Training,
 - Destination marketing and promotion, with priority to incoming and regional tourism and travel.
- Investment support in Social Tourism Development and Education/Youth Tourism exchange.
- Regional and Cross border product development and promotion.

ANNEX III: The framework of the Combined Tourism Product Development

Brezovica as a tourist destination, local and regional tourist values

Brezovica was one of the most famous tourist destinations in Kosovo, until the beginning of the 90ies of the 20th Century in Former YU. It was one of the most famous Winter Ski Centers, developed in the mid-70-is, in the period of similar trend developments in Austria, Slovenia, B&H, and Serbia. Even though; the Hotel's structures and their capacities were primarily dedicated to the Mass Winter Ski business, two very good hotels of that time, Hotel Narcis and Hotel Molika were designed, equipped, and operated with basic accommodation and F&B services. Specifically, Hotel Narcis was constructed and equipped as a high-class hotel with multiple additional functional capacities, for events, conventions, indoor sports, and recreation capacities.

In meantime, the tragic situation with wars and dissolution of Former Yu, as well as the destruction period of the 90ies and the War in Kosovo, has had decisive impacts, both economic and political in the Brezovica area, specifically in the Tourism Sector. The same negative development factors continue in the past 23 years after the War in Kosova, due to the lack of care and basic maintenance investments, the specific status of an enclave until 2010, and hesitation of the Privatization process of former **SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica**, as well as the lack of the clear development orientations, both at the Municipal and Central level in Kosovo.

In a period of several decades, in the 90ies and the last two decades, both market demand and offer have changed substantially, the majority of former winter ski centers in the European and Balkan region, were Rejuvenated and transformed at the Mountain Four-Season Resorts, with a lot of efforts by all stakeholders, to transform the previously majority of domestic visitors to a destination with shared equally to domestic and international visitors. Besides the substantial changes and restructuring of the facilities, substantial changes happened to the Tourist Product its content, and structure. Even with a pretty long time distance and specific situation, it is a must, that Brezovica with its extraordinary potential and resources, needs to start with its Rejuvenation of the former **SOE Inex Sharr Planina Brezovica** to initially modest upgrade and expansion of its capacities, and in meantime to prepare for the fundamental changes, from e seasonal center to an internationally Mountain Resort Center and four-season destination. In that respect, the process of upgrading and expansion first, and substantially changes of Product Development.

1.5.2. Framework for a combined tourism Product development

1. The purpose of coordinating all phases of Tourism Product Development:

- Identification of determinants of the Product
- Identification of Product Elements
- Inventory of Product Elements
- Design of Packages.

2. Integral purpose of product Development engagement

- Influence and orientation in the most elevated and integrated thinking, on the importance of proactive development of the tourism product,
- Significant increase of consideration towards the Sharr Mountains and Brezovica,
- Promoting awareness of future inventive and development initiatives and actions.

3. Thinking about the current development of tourism means:

- **The traditional approach** to Tourism development
- **A strategic approach** to tourism development

4. Tourism in the Economy of Experience, a new era of economics

- In the world tourism market, for several years, there is an increased demand for travel, which:
 - ✓ Engage feelings
 - ✓ Stimulate the mind
 - ✓ Incorporate unique activities, and
 - ✓ Hence, relate personally to travelers, on an emotional, physical, spiritual, or intellectual level.
- Instead of luxury and relatively static rest:
 - ✓ Interest in experiences at all stages of travel increases,
 - ✓ Experiences are based on strong emotions, experiences, the active role and involvement of the visitor, throughout the trip,
 - ✓ All individual service providers should orchestrate events to be remembered, by their customers, to engage each of them, completely personally, and individually.

5. Distribution Channels: Current Practices and Potential Opportunities

- Distribution Channels: travel agencies, digital platforms, and the DMO.

6. The main elements of the Tourist Product

- 5 Essential Elements of the tourist product:
 - ✓ **Program or Attractions**, as a Primary and most important element of the Product, such as powerful attractions from Natural and Cultural Heritage;
 - ✓ **The second element** of the product in terms of importance, **is the transport**, with the network infrastructure and relevant means;
 - ✓ **The third element** is, **accommodation and relevant infrastructure**;
 - ✓ **The Fourth Element** is **food and beverages**, and
 - ✓ **The Fifth Element**, according to importance, is **rest and relaxation**.
- 7. **The content of the tourist product is characterized by the following factors:**
 - **Decisive factors** - Travel motive or Destination with values of primary importance, which cause the visitors experiences of the highest intensity;
 - **Auxiliary factors** - communication routes, means of transport from the place of departure to the destination, and
 - **Accompanying factors** - accommodation, gastronomy and entertainment facilities, and other services to support the experiences, from the arrival of the visitor to the destination to his departure from there.
- 8. **Groups of Attraction elements**
 - Outdoor Recreation and Ecological Protection
 - Cultural heritage - historical and cultural events
 - Attractions of Special Interest
 - Community-based Tourism (Agro, ECO, and Rural Tourism)
 - Conference Tourism
 - SPA & Wellness
 - Health Tourism.

ANNEX IV: Establishing Destination Management Organization in the Brezovica area

Establishing Destination Management Organization in Brezovica Sharr Mountains

Taking into consideration the huge and diverse number of natural and cultural resources, on one side and the lack of all kinds of factors and expertise, for their evaluation, Brezovica needs an urgent intervention with a master management plan and destination marketing strategy, establish a Destination Management Organization (hereinafter DMO). Oriented on Sustainable Tourism Development, it is necessary to establish an implementation body, which will integrate all stakeholders, aiming for adequate and effective Tourism Planning and Development, through the coordination of all individual and engaged residents, business communities, and organizations, on adequate destination management.

DMOs work closely with tourism businesses and organizations interested in the destination, including hotels, attractions, parks, travel agencies, tour operators and guides, restaurants, retail outlets, and conference venues.

1.6.1. The Role of DMO

DMOs should meet the needs of destinations, whether marketing, coordinating stakeholders, influencing business climate, or assisting human resources development. The DMO should heavily influence the destination's final export — the visitor experience.

Common characteristics of a DMO include:

- Registered as an independent, non-profit organization.
- A membership-based organization comprised of a mixture of public, private, non-profit, and academic tourism stakeholders from the region:

- Governed by a board of directors or executive committee reflective of the membership and the composition of the destination
- A comprehensive and detailed set of regulations and by-laws published and available to any interested party
- A diverse set of revenue streams: membership dues, hotel taxes, retail opportunities, online booking commissions, advertising in publications and websites
- Services are mostly provided free to end users.

1.6.2. The main functional subjects of the DMO at the Regional level

1. Tourism Statistics and Monitoring
2. Industry Advocacy
3. Engaging Residents
4. Membership Benefits
5. Membership Benefits

Membership Benefits

- The full-page promotional description on the Strpce/Shtërpce Municipality website;
- Right to distribute sales brochures of their tourism facilities at the tourism information center
- Business linkages with local and international tour operators to promote sustainable tourism activities in the Brezovica area
- Access to hotel and activities booking services through the tourism information center and an online reservation system
- Special distinction as a tourism business supporting sustainable tourism initiatives in the Brezovica area
- Opportunity to be featured in press/FAM trips
- Access to valuable market research findings
- Discounts on additional online advertising to travelers.

Marketing Activities of a DMO

Marketing is often most successful when part of a comprehensive strategy. A marketing plan helps the DMO to prioritize a destination's assets concerning competitors, identify preferred audiences, and develop an action plan on how to reach those audiences. Many of these activities may extend previous exercises completed in the visioning and overall strategy of DMO development.

ANNEX V: Definition and organization of protected tourism zoning

Recommendation – definition, and organization of protected tourism zoning

A tourism zone is an area consisting of tourist sites that are closely linked in terms of nature, history, culture, or otherwise. A tourism zone is designed to enable longer-stay travel of more than 2 nights and 3 days through cooperation among its tourism sites, with the larger goal of enhancing the attractiveness of these sites.

Tourism Protected zoning in Brezovica Sharr Mountains*)

Protecting specifically defined Tourism Zones in the Brezovica area is a necessary process, and should have happened decades before. It is a fact the Brezovica area, has very rich and diversified natural resources, which so far, due to inadequate political will and lack of respect for the law, are suffering multiple damages up to the very high level of degradation of the environment and its biodiversity.

To stop the damage and degradation of natural and cultural resources, both national and local authorities should take urgent steps:

- **Identification of Tourism Zones and tourism Localities,**
- **Definition of Brezovica Tourism Zones and Localities,** in compliance with the Spatial Plan and the Strategy of Sharr National Park,
- **Including all stakeholders and interest groups in its pre-approval public discussion,**
- **Approve at the Municipality, with the consent of national authorities,** the Tourism Zones, and Localities,
- **Working on the Feasibility study,** regarding the framework of probable Tourism Development projects,
- **Working on regulatory and detailed urban plans of tourism zones,** by the Spatial Plan of Sharr National Park
- **Promotion of the Brezovica Tourism Zones and localities,** with regulatory and detailed urban plans, as well as Proposal of Tourism Development Projects, at the national and international level.

*) The approach is based on the project “Product Development of Sharr Mountains” in 2008, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Tourism Expert Group, consisting of an Inter-ministerial team, tourism-related NGO, and municipality directorates, supported by German GTZ – GIZ. The Project was stopped at the final stage, after the changes at the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Proposal for identification of Protected Tourism Zones and Localities of Brezovica

- 1. Tourism Zone of Brezovica with surroundings:**
- 2. Tourism Zone of Sirinika/Syrinika Valley:**
- 3. Tourism Zone of Strpce/Shtërpce and Lepenci Valley.**

Proposal of necessary projects related to the Protected Tourism Zones and Localities of Brezovica zones

- 1. Drafting Regulatory and detailed urban plans of tourism localities:**
 - Brezovica Village including Hotel “Breza”
 - Locality Ski Center Brezovica
 - Muržica Valley,
 - Brezovica, Sharr mountains Potential Localities (1.....Mountain, 2.....Mountain, etc.).

ANNEX VI: Framework Plan for Training of Local Communities on tourism opportunities	
Proposal of a Framework Plan for Training of Local Communities on tourism opportunities	
Training of Local Communities on tourism opportunities	
2 days Informative Training Program	
•	The opportunities and preconditions of developing community Tourism in Kosovo and Brezovica
•	Which forms of Community Tourism Activities in Brezovica and the wider municipality area
•	Basic Information on Probable Destination – Brezovica and the wider region
•	The role and interactive impact of tourists within the local community of the Brezovica area
3 days Basic Practical Instructions	
•	Information on the offering the Reception and accommodation services ✓ Practical presentation within an inhabited House B@B, Homestays, and at the Hotel
•	Information on the Preparation of the Food and beverage products, the Menu and food diversification, ✓ Practical presentation within an inhabited House B@B, Homestays, and at the Hotel

- Basic information on Product and Service Providing I
 - ✓ Basic instructions on Service Providing; breakfast, lunch, dinner, lunch box, pick nick,
 - ✓ Practical presentation within an inhabited House B@B, Homestays, and at the Hotel
- Basic information on Product and Service Providing II
 - ✓ Basic instructions on, traditional forms of Service Providing: breakfast, lunch, dinner, lunch box, pick nick, drinking coffee and tea party
 - ✓ Practical presentation within an inhabited House B@B, Homestays, and at the Hotel
- Joint Resume – Brainstorming on Lesson learned.

ANNEX VII: Recommendation of needed policies and strategies to be applied by the institutions

5. Identification of obstructions that may be present for the development of sustainable tourism in the Brezovica Sharr Mountains

Better understanding, adequate evaluation, and reward for Tourism Sector in the Brezovica area

- To learn more and offer more constructive political will, to acknowledge and accept the role of Tourism Development in the Economic and Overall Development of the Brezovica area,
- To organize a comprehensive and sincere public debate with the local community of the Brezovica area, conducted by joint Municipal and Central Kosovo Government Comity, coordinated by sectorial experts, to explain and make the local community accept the necessity of substantial changes towards the overall tourism development of Brezovica area, on their direct and indirect benefit,
- Undertake all necessary measures to stop immediately and decisively any construction without a regulatory plan,
- To continue effectively with the legal process, strictly inspections and stopping the issuing of construction permits without a regulatory plan,
- To intensify the preparations and finalize the drafting of the new and improved Law on Hospitality, including experienced local and international experts,
- Defining and advancing the position of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry, within the priorities, together with other sectors,
- To acknowledge and evaluate properly the overall impacts of the Tourism and Hospitality sector
- ***Legal regulations must be drafted and approved without delay***, either through the Law or by-laws - Regulations, where the Competencies for the Construction of Touristic Resorts and Structures are defined in the National Parks.
- Drafting of the new Plan for the National Parks of Sharr and Bjeshket Nemuna
- ***For Third Zones*** - Tourist Buildings, Regulatory Plans should be drawn up soonest possible,
- Competences in Drafting Regulatory Plans at Municipal levels:
 - Financing needs to be done from the central level – the Ministry of Spatial Planning, due to the impossibility of financing from the municipal level, especially in small municipalities,
 - Procedures and Regulatory Planning to be guided by the relevant municipal Directorates,
- Implementation of Regulatory Plans and Granting of Building Permits:
 - Municipality for residential facilities and private houses, with the consent of the Ministry,
 - Ministry for Tourist Resorts and Hotel Facilities;
- The Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure and the Directorates of National Parks will supervise the Implementation of the Plans;
- Adequately reward with subsidies private owners and families, which invest in the sustainable forms of sustainable tourism (Community tourism, Agro Tourism, ECO Tourism) as well as joint venture investments with Diaspora and FDI investors;

- Adequately promoting and rewarding the Professional Education in Tourism Sector, supporting specifically young women;
- To stimulate and support the use of professional standards, in all business activities, and all phases of Business Planning, Development, and Management.

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